



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

THOMAS D. WATKINS, JR.
SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

June 20, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Thomas D. Watkins, Jr., Chairman

SUBJECT: Discussion With Representatives from the Department of Civil Rights Regarding the Use of American Indian Mascots and Logos

During the public participation portion of the March 27, 2003, meeting of the State Board of Education, concern regarding the use of American Indian mascots and logos was raised. In response to the concerns, Mrs. Kathleen Straus, president of the Board appointed a subcommittee (John Austin, Sharon Gire, Marianne McGuire, and Kathleen Straus) to review the materials and to make a recommendation to the Board.

The subcommittee met with Department of Education staff and representatives from the Department of Civil Rights and has drafted a resolution (Exhibit A) for Board consideration. In addition, the following documents are attached for your information:

- 2000 American Indian Off-Reservation Agenda – Education Section (Exhibit B)
- Michigan Civil Rights Commission Resolution on American Indian Mascots (Exhibit C)
- Michigan Anishnabe Educational Forum on Educational Issues Affecting American Indians – Awareness, Strategies and Solutions for American Indian Mascots, Logos and Nicknames (Exhibit D)

It is recommended that the State Board of Education adopt the resolution attached to the Superintendent's memorandum dated June 20, 2003, regarding the Use of American Indian Mascots and Logos.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Proposed Resolution

Use of American Indian Mascots and Logos

WHEREAS, people of all cultures, races, and religions have a right to be treated with dignity and respect; and

WHEREAS, the Michigan State Board of Education believes it is important that all students learn about the cultural aspects of various communities so that they will understand cultural norms, develop tolerance, respect differences, and become good citizens and productive adults; and

WHEREAS, some American Indian tribes, organizations, state and local officials, and private citizens find the use of American Indian mascots, nicknames, logos, and symbols within our public schools to be offensive, and further find that their use has a detrimental effect on the educational achievement of American Indian students

WHEREAS, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, by Resolution dated May 20, 2003, *“encourages all school districts to ensure that instructional materials, course work, policies, and procedures are respectful of cultural differences and enhance cultural competency, and are void of stereotypic language and representations”*; and

WHEREAS, the United States Commission on Civil Rights, by Resolution dated April 13, 2001, called for an end to the use of American Indian images and team names by schools: *“Schools should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture of people. Stereotypes of American Indians teach all students that the stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in such a diverse society”*; and

WHEREAS, the Michigan State Board of Education has adopted *Policies for Creating Effective Learning Environments, Policies on Bullying, and Policies on Safe Schools*, and encourages school districts to work to promote positive learning atmospheres that foster learning for all Michigan’s children; and

WHEREAS, educators have a responsibility to model behavior that celebrates and respects the diverse traditions and beliefs of all citizens; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education recognizes that this matter should be addressed at the local level of each separate school district; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Michigan State Board of Education promotes curricula that is fair, appropriate, and accurate in depicting the cultures and histories of all people; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Michigan State Board of Education recommends that educators teach all students to be aware of and respectful of various cultures present in society; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Michigan State Board of Education supports and recommends the elimination of American Indian mascots, logos, fight songs, insignias, names, antics, and team descriptors by all Michigan schools.

2000 American Indian Off-Reservation Agenda- Education Section

Department of Education

1. As a result of lack of services and programs, Michigan Indians perform poorly on MEAP tests and have a high dropout rate.

MEAP test scores for Michigan Indian students:

Mathematics portion of the high school MEAP test: 29.8% of the American Indian students were not endorsed for the 1998 school year, and 31.6% for 1999, compared to White students who had a 15.1% rate of nonendorsement for 1998, and 14.8% for 1999.

Reading portion of the high school MEAP test: 36.4% of the American Indian students were not endorsed for 1998 school-year, and 32.9 for 1999, compared to white students who had a 19.3% rate of nonendorsement for 1998, and 14.2% for 1999.

Writing portion of the high school MEAP test: 22.8% of the American Indian students were not endorsed for 1998 school-year, and 23.3% for 1999, compared to white students who had a 12.1% rate of nonendorsement for 1998, and 12.5% for 1999.

Science portion of the high school MEAP test: 29.5% of the American Indian students were not endorsed for 1998 school-year, and 33.0% for 1999, compared to white students who had a 13.8% rate of nonendorsement for 1998, and 14.5% for 1999.

Drop out rates for Michigan Indians:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory reported 36% national dropout rate for American Indians, the highest reported for any cultural group.

Sexton High School, Office of Research, Evaluation and Pupil Accounting, Lansing, Michigan, reported a 40% American Indian dropout rate in August 1999. Similar trends have been reported statewide, with even higher dropout rates reported in the more rural, northern areas.

Basic causes for drop out:

The Michigan State Board of Education reported, "*Studies demonstrate that students who feel a positive connection with other students and adults at school and with family members are more likely to be successful learners and to avert behaviors that put them or others at risk.*"

Absence of positive role models for American Indian children in the public school system. For the 1998-99 fiscal year of the Main MIDE Civil Service WF21 Report, race and gender analysis nationwide have shown a great disparity in the availability of minority educators. White teachers have a 20.7% rate for men, and 65% for women;

African-American teachers have a 3.2% rate for men, and 7.5% rate for women; American Indian teachers average 0.0% for men, and 0.4% for women.

2. Michigan Indians history is not taught in public schools causing lack of awareness, respect and understanding of American Indians.

Public school curriculum:

Richard St. Germaine, Ph.D., at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, after teaching in thirty K-12 American Indian school systems, reported: *"minority children, having been initially raised in a distinctive culture of their own, are often thrust into a school system that promotes the values of the majority culture—not of their own. A tragic paradox emerges: success (in school) becomes failure (in the community), and failure becomes success."*

P. Wilson reported in *Trauma of Sioux Indian High School Students*, Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 22(4) (1991) that: language barriers, lack of integration of cultural and traditional methods of learning, and different social norms add to the problems of American Indian students in public schools. *"they faced racial prejudice, isolation, low expectations of teachers and a 'structure [which] appeared to them to have been designed for their failure, and American Indian students fail, practically overnight."*

3. American Indians suffer from negative stereotypes.

American Indian school mascots and logos:

J. S. Phinney (1989) reported that African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians all suffer from negative stereotypes imposed by the dominant American culture which denigrates precisely those aspects of ethnic culture that minorities take pride in. According to David P. Rider, Ph.D., *"Nowhere are such negative appraisals of minority groups more blatant than in the mascots and Indian names of sports teams that proliferate in the American education system. While other minority groups in America must endure negative stereotypes, American Indians are the only minority group that has those stereotypes advertised in government-funded public schools. American Indian mascots help to promote and perpetuate the dehumanizing stereotypes that developed among European colonizers centuries ago. As such, they are harmful to both American Indians and non-American Indians. American Indians endure the psychological damage of seeing cartoon-like caricatures of themselves embodied in the mascots, perhaps the ultimate in dehumanizing victims."*

The United States Justice Department has sent notification to a North Carolina high school informing them that they will be subjected to investigation concerning racial harassment charges as a result of their American Indian mascot.

The American Anthropological Association (AAA), passed a resolution which reads in part:

We, the members of the American Anthropological Association, call upon all educators and administrators of educational institutions to stop promoting stereotypical representation of American Indian people through the use of sports mascots. The persistence of such officially sanctioned stereotypical presentations humiliates American Indian people, trivializes the scholarship of anthropologists, undermines the learning environment for all students, and seriously compromises efforts to promote diversity on school and college campuses.

Michigan has over 75 schools using Indian mascot logos and names.

Michigan Civil Rights Commission

RESOLUTION ON AMERICAN INDIAN MASCOTS

WHEREAS, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission is empowered pursuant to its authority under the Michigan Constitution and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to "secure the full enjoyment of civil rights guaranteed by the law and the constitution through the elimination of unlawful discrimination"; and

WHEREAS, the Commission understands that the use of American Indian mascots is a chronic and growing issue for public school systems across the nation. Accordingly, public schools are at the forefront in assessing the impact caused by mascots, where the objective is to provide a safe, supportive, and nondiscriminatory learning environment for all students; and

WHEREAS, the use of the culture of a people as mascots, logos, symbols or nicknames perpetuates stereotyping and cultural insensitivity. The activities associated with the use of these nicknames often irreverently depict sacred customs, rituals, and people, perpetuating the lack of respect for other cultures. It prevents children from forming a positive identity and developing appropriate and healthy levels of self-esteem; and

WHEREAS, regardless of the prideful identification or other good intentions, the use of racial nicknames is overwhelmingly resented by the group of people it is intended to honor; and

WHEREAS, in Michigan, there are approximately 75 schools currently using American Indian mascot names, and

WHEREAS, school administrators, staff, parents and community members play a critical role in modeling behavior that celebrates and honors cultural traditions and beliefs.

THEREFORE, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission acknowledges the importance of Michigan students learning about diversity so that they will understand, respect and celebrate people's differences and draw strength from them and become good citizens and productive adults.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, in its continuing effort to eliminate discrimination, opposes the use of a people's culture or race as mascots, logos, symbols or nicknames, and recommends the methods used by the Marshall Public Schools Board of Education and its Nickname Task Force as a model for other school districts to emulate in their own assessments. The model stresses the importance of actively including the community, faculty and students in the decision making process.

FURTHER RESOLVED, the Commission encourages all school districts to ensure that instructional materials, course work, policies and procedures are respectful of cultural differences and enhance cultural competency, and are void of stereotypic language and representations.

NOW, THEREFORE, IS IT RESOLVED, that the Commission directs the Michigan Department of Civil Rights to engage in discussion and collaborative initiatives with the Michigan State Board of Education and Michigan Department of Education to address educational issues affecting cultural populations represented in Michigan communities.

Given under and ratified on this 20th day of May, 2002, by the

MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

Gary Torgow, Chair

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Michigan Anishnabe Educational Forum on Educational Issues Affecting American Indians

Awareness, Strategies and Solutions for American Indian Mascots, Logos and Nicknames

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights, the American Indian Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan and Thomas M. Cooley Law School hosted its first in a series of educational forums on issues affecting Michigan Indian students last month.

The purpose of this first forum was to bring awareness of the impact that the American Indian mascots, logos and nickname have on the educational system and to seek strategies and solutions to address the negative effect on students. After listening and learning from individuals that were personally involved in the effort to eliminate American Indian mascots, logos and nicknames from public school districts, the participants were asked to discuss two questions:

*What can we do individually to address the issue?
What can we do collectively?*

The following are some of the solutions identified by the participants:

- Meet with curriculum directors to impact school curricula to include American Indian history, culture and treaties and eliminate inaccuracies, biases and stereotypes
- Teach the culture and spirituality to American Indian children
- Involve governmental agencies
- Revise history books
- Organize and educate the American Indian community on the issue
- Model after national organizations
- Create speakers bureaus to address schools and parents
- Confront ignorance in a respectful manner
- Educate teachers, college students, schools, school boards and athletic organizations
- Include diversity and cultural competency in licensing requirements for teachers
- Provide culturally sensitive education and tolerance to students, schools and school boards
- Have MDCR provide education on its process as it relates to mascot issues
- Educate the news media on the negative impact of the issue
- Hold educational protests
- Hold a national conference in Michigan
- Educate state legislators
- Educate and work with youth groups
- Form partnerships and alliances with other organizations to form a statewide diversity coalition
- Start a letter writing campaign to the media, state legislators, schools, etc.
- Create Native cultural centers

The forum was a very positive experience, with representatives from more than fifteen different organizations coming together for a common cause. A second forum of this Educational Series will be on implementing the solutions and strategies and will be scheduled by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) in the near future. If you are interested in attending the next meeting or working individually or collectively on eliminating the use of American Indian mascots, logos or nicknames, please contact MDCR at (517) 335-3165.